

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-11 ISO-00 ARAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 OMB-01

ACDA-05 /080 W

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O 122300Z JAN 76

FM AMCONSUL BELIZE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4615

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

US MISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 0097

AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA IMMEDIATE

USCINCSO IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T BELIZE 0026

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR PFOR GT BH

SUBJECT: GOVERNOR POSNETT'S COMMENTS ON THE UK-GUATEMALA DISPUTE

REF: BELIZE 0005

1. I CALLED ON GOVERNOR POSNETT JANUARY 12 TO HEAR WHAT HE HAD TO SAY ABOUT HIS VISIT TO LONDON WHERE HE HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN DISCUSSIONS WITH FCO CONCERNING THE UK-GUATEMALA TERRITORIAL DISPUTE OVER BELIZE.

2. PLACE, DATE AND PARTICIPANTS (TENTATIVE). H.E. SAID TENTATIVE PLANS CALLED FOR TALKS BETWEEN REPRESENTATIVES OF HMG AND GOG TO BEGIN IN NEW ORLEANS ON OR ABOUT FEB 9. HE HOPED (AND THOUGHT LIKELY) HMG WOULD BE REPRESENTED BY JUNIOR MINISTER OF THE FCO, TED ROWLANDS, ASSUMING GUATEMALA FOREIGN MINISTER MOLINA WOULD ALSO DECIDE TO ATTEND. IN SUCH CASE HE THOUGHT PREMIER PRICE MIGHT HEAD THE BELIZEAN CONTINGENT WHICH WOULD BE PRESENT AT TALKS IN ASSOCIATION WITH UK REPS. HE THOUGHT TALKS AT THIS LEVEL OFFERED FAR BETTER PROSPECTS TOWARD A SETTLE-
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MENT. IF EITHER ROWLANDS OR MOLINA INDICATED THEY COULD NOT PAR-

TICIPATE UK AMBASSADOR RICHARD WOULD BE UK REP AND FOREIGN OFFICE OFFICIALS SUCH AS AYCENENA OR SKINNER-KLEE FOR GUATEMALA. IN THAT EVENT, HARRY COURTENAY, PRICE'S PRINCIPAL ADVISER ON THE DISPUTE, WOULD REPRESENT BELIZE, PROBABLY ACCOMPANIED BY ATTORNEY GENERAL ASSAD SHOMAN, BUT H.E. DOUBTED THAT ANYTHING COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED AT THAT LEVEL.

3. OUTLOOK. EVEN UNDER THE MOST FAVORABLE CIRCUMSTANCES, H.E. SAID HE WAS NOT OPTIMISTIC THAT THE TALKS WOULD ACHIEVE ANYTHING USEFUL BECAUSE THE GAP BETWEEN THE DISPUTANTS WAS TOO WIDE. THE UK REP WOULD BE PREPARED TO BE FORTHCOMING ON PROPOSALS TO GUARANTEE AGAINST CUBAN INFLUENCE, TO ADJUST BOUNDARIES OF THE TERRITORIAL SEA IN THE GULF OF AMATIQUE, TO GRANT EASY ACCESS TO BELIZEAN PORTS AND TO MAKE A CASH SETTLEMENT, BUT AS REGARDS THE CESSION OF TERRITORY, HE SAW NO HOPE AT ALL.

4. PROSPECTS FOR A CESSION OF BELIZEAN TERRITORY TO GUATEMALA. THE GOVERNOR POINTED OUT THAT THE LANGUAGE OF THE UNGA RESOLUTION WHICH REAFFIRMED THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF BELIZE, MADE A DIFFICULT PROPOSITION VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE. ROWLANDS, HE SAID, HAD WORKED PRICE OVER THOROUGHLY ON THIS POINT BUT PRICE HAD TAKEN THE POSITION THAT PROBLEM WAS NOT SO MUCH A MATTER OF HIS OWN WISHES BUT THAT A CESSION WOULD PROVOKE A REACTION OF OUTRAGE AMONG THE BELIZEAN PEOPLE. IT WOULD BE PARTICULARLY INDEFENSIBLE, PRICE HAD ARGUED, IN VIEW OF THE REFERENCE TO TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY CONTAINED IN THE UNGA RESOLUTION. RATHER THAN TRY TO SELL SUCH A MEASURE TO THE BELIZEAN BODY POLITIC, HE WOULD BOW OUT AS PREMIER AND LET SOMEONE ELSE TRY TO PEDDLE THIS LINE. THE GOVERNOR OBSERVED THAT HMG VIEWED PRICE AS THE ONLY MAN MOST LIKELY TO BE ABLE TO SELL ANY EVENTUAL SETTLEMENT PACKAGE TO THE COUNTRY AND HENCE WOULD NOT BE INTERESTED IN FORCING HIM OUT OF OFFICE ON THE CESSION ISSUE.

5. IF TALKS FAIL, WHAT NEXT? IF THE TALKS PRODUCED ANOTHER STALEMANTE, AS H.E. ANTICIPATED, THE NEXT STEP WOULD BE FOR THE PARTIES TO REPORT BACK TO THE UN COMMITTEE OF TWENTY-FOUR ON DECOLONIALIZATION. THE LATTER MIGHT ELECT TO SEND A COMMISSION OF INQUIRY, OR TO PROPOSE AN OBSERVER FOR ANOTHER ROUND OF TALKS OR, H.E. CONCEDED, IT MIGHT CALL UPON THE UK TO PROVIDE REQUISITE SECURITY TO BELIZE DURING AN INITIAL PERIOD OF

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INDEPENDENCE. HMG WOULD NOT WELCOME THE LATTER, H.E. AVERRED, BECAUSE IT DID NOT WANT TO RISK A SITUATION WHICH COULD LEAD TO AN INEXTRICABLE VIETNAM TYPE INVOLVEMENT. ALTHOUGH HE BELIEVED THE STATUS QUO WAS FAST BECOMING INTOLERABLE HE CONCEDED THAT THE VARIOUS UN MECHANISMS WHICH MIGHT BE EMPLOYED WOULD NOT SEEM TO LEAD WITH CERTAINTY TOWARD A SETTLEMENT. HIS HOPE WAS THAT AS THE GUATEMALANS SAW THEIR SUPPORT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY CONTINUE TO ERODE THEY MIGHT EVENTUALLY

SEE IT IN THEIR OWN INTEREST TO SCALE DOWN THEIR DEMANDS TO A LEVEL THE UK MIGHT BE ABLE TO MEET. IN ANY CASE, HE OBSERVED, THE DISPUTE WAS IN THE PROCESS OF EVOLVING INTO A UN-GUATEMALA CONFRONTATION IN PLACE OF ONE IN WHICH THE UK AND GUATEMALA WERE PITTED AGAINST EACH OTHER, AND HE THOUGHT THE GOG WOULD BE MUCH LESS COMFORTABLE WITH THE UN AS ITS ADVERSARY.

6. FORCE REDUCTION. THE GOVERNOR SAID HE KNEW THAT THE GOG WANTED SOME BRITISH FORCE REDUCTIONS BEFORE ENTERING INTO TALKS. THE FCO ALSO WANTED THIS, BUT HE HAD RECOMMENDED AGAINST ANY SUCH MOVE UNTIL IT WAS CLEAR THE GUATEMALANS HAD MADE SIGNIFICANT REDUCTIONS IN THE FORCES RANGED ALONG THE BORDER. HE UNDERSTOOD THERE WERE FOUR COMPANIES, TOTALING ABOUT A THOUSAND MEN PLUS HEAVY WEAPONS AND ARMORED VEHICLES, FROM POPTUN TO LA POLVORA, ONLY ABOUT A COMPANY LESS THAN AT THE HEIGHT OF THE CRISIS (ONE COMPANY HAVING BEEN SHIFTED TO ZACAPA). THEN THERE WAS THE BATTALION AT PUERTO BARRIOS WITH THE AMPHIBIOUS CAPABILITY AFFORDED BY THIRTEEN GUNBOATS. THIS NOT TO MENTION THE PARATROOP BATTALION, WHOSE LOCATION WAS UNIMPORTANT SINCE IT COULD BE DEPLOYED SWIFTLY TO WHEREVER NEEDED. THE SAME COULD BE SAID OF THE GUATEMALAN AIRFORCE, BUT HE THOUGHT THE HARRIERS COULD COPE WITH THE LATTER. FOR THE BRITISH, HE POINTED OUT, FORCE REDUCTION MEANT SHIPPING THE FORCES REDUCED BACK TO BRITAIN. FOR GUATEMALA IT MEANT SHIFTING THEM ONLY A FEW HUNDRED MILES. NEVERTHELESS, HE SAID, HE WOULD LIKE TO BE ABLE TO GIVE THE FCO HIS CONCURRENCE IN A FORCE REDUCTION AND WOULD DO SO AS SOON AS HE COULD BE CERTAIN A SIGNIFICANT FORCE REDUCTION IN THE LA POLVORA POPTUN AREA HAD TAKEN PLACE. I ASKED HIM WHETHER HE WAS CONFIDENT OF THE ACCURACY OF HIS INTELLIGENCE, AND HE REPLIED THAT "MOST OF IT COMES FROM YOUR CHAPS."

7. I TOLD THE GOVERNOR MY IMPRESSION WAS THAT THERE HAD BEEN MORE OF A REDUCTION OF GUATEMALAN TROOPS ALONG THE BELIZE
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BORDER THAN HIS FIGURES SEEMED TO INDICATE, BUT THAT IN ANY CASE I WOULD REPORT HIS COMMENTS PROMPTLY TO THE APPROPRIATE ADDRESSEES.

8. I ASSUME THAT IF LATER DATA IS AVAILABLE ON GUATEMALAN TROOP DEPLOYMENT THAN THAT CITED TO ME BY GOVERNOR POSNETT, IT WILL BE COMMUNICATED TO HIM PROMPTLY THROUGH ESTABLISHED CHANNELS.
GAWF

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN POLICY POSITION, BOUNDARY CLAIMS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 12 JAN 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: greeneet
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976BELIZE00026
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760012-0240
From: BELIZE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760167/aaaachpy.tel
Line Count: 163
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 BELIZE 5
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: greeneet
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <12 MAY 2004 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <15 SEP 2004 by greeneet>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GOVERNOR POSNETT'S COMMENTS ON THE UK-GUATEMALA DISPUTE
TAGS: PBOR, PFOR, GT, BH, UK, (POSNETT)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006